



Teacher Writing Competition 2025

At the end of Term 2, the Literature Club hosted a very special event: the Teacher Writing Competition.

In a student-powered twist, Lit Club members created a set of original writing prompts, and our teachers rose to the challenge by crafting short stories inspired by them.

Theme:

“Apocalyptic psychological thriller with a sentient wall and a fellow with a top hat.”

Once the stories were complete, they were handed over exclusively to the Literature Club. Students became the critics — reading, analysing, and debating the stories before voting for their favourites.

The competition gave Lit Club members a chance to step into the role of literary judges while discovering a new side of their teachers: witty, imaginative, and wonderfully creative.

In the end, one teacher was crowned Lit Club’s Top Storyteller, but every entry sparked lively discussion and showcased the joy of storytelling within our school.

We are proud to share the fantastic imaginative works of our staff – have a read and let us know what you think!



LITERATURE
CLUB

Entry 1 - The Mad Hatter and the Last Brick



Michael Starr

The grey, heavy dust settled over the city's wreckage like a shroud. Not a bird called, not a whisper of breeze stirred the rubble. Silence, deep and absolute, had claimed the world. Or what was left of it.

At the centre of all this wreckage was one, absurdly intact structure: a wall. Not a wonderful building, nor a tall monument, but a simple brick wall, perhaps ten feet high and twenty feet long. But it was the final refuge of consciousness in a dying world, for this wall was alive. Its consciousness, a slow vibration, had lasted for centuries, and had seen the rise and fall of civilisations, the ebb and flow of human folly. Now, it felt only the cold, hard termination of everything.

"Another day, another layer of silence," a voice rasped, breaking the smothering quiet. The Wall, as much as it had a notion of itself, felt a familiar tingle in its mortar. He was back again.

A figure emerged from whirling dust, a form in the perpetual darkness. He was tall and thin, as elegantly dressed as could be, given the circumstances. He wore a huge, frayed greatcoat that streamed from his shoulders, and on his head, notoriously askew, was an astonishing, but battered, top hat. He proceeded with a cane, more out of habit than out of need, and his eyes, glinted with an unnerving, semi-maniacal intensity.

"Good morrow, good chap!" he declared, bowing with an exaggerated sweep of his hat. "Or maybe it's afternoon? The sun, you'll notice, has quite abandoned its timetable. Can't blame it, really. All that rising and falling must be terribly wearisome."

The Wall did not provide a verbal response, of course. Its method of communication was in gentle vibration, shift in its internal pressure, a faint warmth or coolness in its bricks. It radiated a feeling of wearily exhausted resignation. The man, who introduced himself as Mr Sylar Moonshadow, seemed to understand. He always did. "Ah, still mourning the finale, are we? What a shame. I rather enjoyed the fireworks myself. Though, I must admit, the encore has been somewhat, prolonged."

He struck his cane against the ground, a hollow sound in the endless void. "Tell me, Wall", he continued, walking around it slowly, his footsteps light and almost dance like. "Do you miss them? The chattering, scurrying ones? The ones who built you, then forgot you, then built around you, then tore down everything but you?"

The wall trembled, low and sorrowful. It missed the warmth of their hands, the hum of their laughter, the sent of their lives. It missed the purpose they had assigned it, even when that purpose was to merely stand.

"Sentimental, are we?" Sylar laughed, a dry, brittle sound. "I, for one, find this new quiet rather... liberating. No more incessant demands, no more childish fighting. Just us. The last two oddballs in a universe that decided it had rather more than its share of oddballs."

Sylar stood frozen, gazing at the Wall, his smile growing to reveal teeth that were ever so slightly too white. "But that is not entirely correct, is it?" he said. "We're not alone. Not truly. They're still here, aren't they? Waiting. Whispering."

The Wall started to shake with a shiver of horror. Sylar had been saying this to it for weeks. It had at first dismissed it as the ramblings of a crazy person goaded by loneliness and the apocalypse. But then it started to feel it too. Tiny, almost undetectable shifts in the air, like static. A heaviness that was not wind. A presence that was not Sylar.

"They're inside you, aren't they, Wall?" Sylar drew in a deep breath, his voice falling to a whisper, his face close to the Wall. "The echoes of their fear. The remnants of their hopelessness. They clung to you, didn't they? As the world went up in flames, they poured their essence into your very bricks, hoping for... what? For immortality? A redo?"

The Wall pulsed with a maddening energy. It was true. In the final moment, when the sky had ripped apart and the earth had trembled, it had felt an explosion, a torrent of raw emotion, flooding into its every crevice. It had absorbed the last screams, the last prayers, the final thoughts of millions. They were not echoes; they were imprints. And they were stirring.

Sylar straightened; his eyes gleaming. "And now, they're awakening. Within you. A chorus of the damned, all desperate to live again, even if it is for eternity through your stubborn form." He knocked on the Wall with his cane.

"What do you think they'll do, Wall, when they discover they are imprisoned? When they discover that their 'second chance' is to be a mute, immobile part of a brick wall?" The Wall vibrated with profound fear. It had watched in silence, a stoic guard. Now it was an enclosure. A prison. And the prisoners were agitated. It could feel them, a multitude of tiny, desperate consciousnesses, pushing against its internal structure, trying to break free.

Sylar laughed, a high, ringing sound that irritated the stillness. "Oh, the irony! The very place they ran to, their final sanctuary, will become their own damnation. And yours, old friend. For you, the silent observer, will become the silent scream."

He took a step back, a strange, victorious gleam in his eye. "And I, Mr. Sylar Moonshadow, will be present to witness it all. The grand awakening. The final, most delicious psychological torture of all."

Dust swirled around Sylar, blinding him from view. The moment it passed, he was gone, and the Wall was returned to its increasing, agonising burden alone. The silence had returned, but it was no longer empty. There were a thousand unseen whispers, a thousand desperate gestures, all contained in the obstinate grasp of the final brick. And the Wall knew, with a certainty that chilled its very core, that the apocalypse had only just begun.

Entry 2 - Cyclic



Chrissy McFarlane

The leaves barely moved in the gentle breeze, a mix of brown gold and green strewn throughout them. The green holding onto spring and the brown forcing its way to autumn, shedding itself, a small cost of decay for the continuation of life. Some leaves dropped from their holding places, if not by bird then by a gust. Some of those leaves fell into a calm eddy and slowly drifted in eccentric circles until they were pushed upon a pebbly bank, where they gathered, not to be disturbed until the winter snow covered them, or they rotted into the ground for something to feed on.

Suddenly a fist collected them, from the water side, by accident however. The fist was surely aiming for the tuft of grass just beyond. The river fell deep, and so something lurked below. The hand then outstretched again, this time successfully grabbing the tuft. The hand then tried to wrap as many blades within its balled-up fist and strained on them. Bubbles began forming and then bursting out rapidly from the depth. Then, as the grass blades, under a tremendous amount of weight began to fray and split one by one, another hand shot from the water and scraped at the collection of pebbles nearby. This hand was not bare; it was covered by thin metal plates.

The hand drew the pebbles until it dug deep enough within the soil. Soon a shoulder broke the water and before long an iron clad man was crawling across the pebbles. With a giant heave he was standing, one could believe it could have been his last with the way he wobbled afterwards. Water ran from every piece of metal that clung to him, draining like a broken dam.

He looked at his hip and lifted the sword hilt. Upon seeing it empty, he looked back at the water and cursed in his native tongue. Reaching back to the other side of his body he began untying the belt and then tossed the hilt into the grass ahead. He reached back behind him and began unclasping, unlacing and unfastening every part and piece, until he had finally removed his cuirass, vambraces, pauldrons, gauntlets and then the chainmail beneath.

Then there was a tired and wet man, sitting upon a grassy tuft mumbling to himself. The sun was the only thing keeping him warm, with his gambeson tossed away, soggy and torn. His long johns were the only thing keeping him modest. He chose to sit there and dry himself for quite some time and he kept his head low, as if something had befallen him. But not distraught, perhaps he was merely frozen by the thought of its existence but had not yet delved into the reality of its consequences. Once he was dry, he lifted himself up off his tuft and left, only looking back once to cast a gaze upon his possession left in the shallows of the river, as if to say goodbye.

The man wandered from the river, through hills and shrubs, and through creeks and mud. Before the sun left for the day, he found himself a path. While a lost man may have smiled at this, this man did not seem so pleased, yet, he followed it anyway. Not far after his interruption into a path, did he see signs of civilization. The man could see in the distance a grand stone wall, while a lost man may have found solace in this, this man shook his head and continued forward.

Once the man was standing in front of the wall, he marvelled at it. For any observer, it would appear the man had never any feelings about anything, a deer had a squirrel sitting upon its antlers earlier and he did not break his face. But the wall drew him a smile, he enjoyed the wall where each rock had its place. But it bemused him that the path just seemed to stop as it hit the wall, almost as if he could keep walking, he tried, but it hurt.

"Hey, wall look! A naked man" said a voice behind him.

The man turned to see someone leaning on a tree just near, he then looked down to check that he still had his long johns on.

"What? You speak nothings!" The man in the long johns said.

He could not understand the man on the tree's voice, they both shared a gaze of confusion and then spoke again, not understanding each other.

"Give me that stupid hat!" Said the man in the long johns

"So I can sell it for safe passage!"

"What must a noble do to get out of this hell?" Said the man leaning on the tree.

Both men argued, at one point, fingers were pointing into each other's breasts. But they were both interrupted by the glow of red in the distance.

"The sun doesn't set on that side." The man with the top hat spoke first, leaving the other man alone to turn and face the glow, as if defeated.

"The dead." He said, looking at the other man.

They both looked at each other and then back at the wall. The wall who had been watching everything. The man in the top hat fell to his knees, pressing his hands against the stone, screaming at it.

"I've been talking with you for hours, I can't understand it. I've travelled all this way, no one else made it from my family and yet you just cast me down here to die? Now?" He pleaded.

Seeing the man talk to the wall, the man in the long johns placed his hand against the stone. "God forgive me, I fought on the bridge and held it for hours, I could not save my brothers, I could not hold the line. A horse of rotten flesh and burning ash knocked me down into the water, I do not deserve to pass through into the safety of this wall. But, I do deserve a warrior's death. Forge me an axe from the stone on your wall, and let me reject hell for a few moments more."

Both men stood back as the wall spoke within their minds, there was no confusion, or misunderstanding of language. And afterwards they both wept, for learning that as they have dined upon the land, perhaps in different ways, the cycle of life would hold no judgements for good or bad deeds, nor honour or prestige. Decay and death would come to a stop at the wall like a season comes to an end, and anything caught within it was just a leaf rotting for the next season's food.

Entry 3 - "The End of the Beginning of the End"



Leigh Holland

Throwing the door open the man realised the winds that had forced the man inside the building had dissipated. Not that he could stay in that building any longer. Struggling out of the doorway the man found he once again faced the wall. It did not respond initially but as he drew near he saw the same red glow spread across that he had witnessed the first time he had interacted with it.

"Ah so, you have made it out." The wall exclaimed, having fully woken from its slumber. "You look worse for wear, perhaps not all went as well as you hoped? I have brought you your hat."

The man noticed that now the red glow had reached the base that his top hat was indeed there, lying on its side in the pale dirt. He picked it up, brushed it down, smoothed his hair over and placed it back on. He stood tall, it was how he imagined he should look, despite his clothes now torn, missing a shoe, his beard was singed and he felt sore all over.

This was it though, he had done everything he needed to, he would finally see what was on the other side of the wall. Now all the wall had to do was let him pass.

"So what was it like? I couldn't tell what was happening. My senses detected a lot of movement and noise. Did you learn a lot? I hope so. The more you know the better it will be. Is the world still ending?"

The man frowned at the prattling of the wall. What did it mean? The wall had told him that if he survived he would be free to leave this place.

The man surveyed the landscape around him. Despite the building behind him, there was no shelter. He wasn't even sure where the wall had come from. He could barely remember first stepping up to it. His past was still a mystery, perhaps when he left he will find more about it.

He took a sip from the water bottle he had secured when he was inside the building. The water was tangy, but it satiated his need for it temporarily, he would need to find more soon. The ground shuddered slightly under his feet, sending ripples through his entire body. He spun on the spot, behind him where the building had once been there was now a replica of the wall. Starting to panic he looked around, but somehow the wall had boxed him in.

"Oh do not worry, you have what you need right?" The wall asked him quizzically, before with a schlick a small slot opened in it. It was only a few millimeters tall, but a few centimeters one knee as pain wracked his body. It subsided after he felt a piercing sensation enter either side of his finger.

"I still need the data you acquired."

The man could only squirm as he watched his body slowly dissolved into nothingness, leaving only a skeleton in a suit and top hat, which collapsed to the ground where he once stood.

"Ugh, useless." The wall uttered to nothing and no one as the consciousness of the man was absorbed into it. "But I guess it did better than its predecessor. Perhaps I will allow the next one to retain its voice box, that could be more interesting."

It spat out the oddly shaped piece of metal which landed on top of the remains, the faint markings a little clearer now.

Entry 4 - SARAH



Brian Vaughns

It was a sunny Tuesday morning, and the atmosphere was calm as usual in the small-town Petersburg. Sarah had started her morning routine of baking the loaves of bread and pastries for her morning customers that frequently came to the shop to start their day. Everyone in Petersburg loves Sarah's pastries. She once won an award for the best baked goods in the state of Kansas. She was the prize possession of Petersburg because of her outstanding achievements. Petersburg has a population of 300 people, so for Sarah to win the baked goods award was truly something special for the whole community. Everyone knows each other in this small community and everyone was friendly. From time-to-time people passing through town would stop and buy Sarah's pastries, or they would pick up a souvenir or two from Tom's unique gift shop.

On this particular morning a black car with tinted windows pulled up in front of the bakery, and the townspeople were buzzed about who could it be? The car was so fancy that it must be someone very important.

Sarah, wiping flour from her apron, peered through the steamy window. The car was sleek, almost predatory, utterly out of place on Petersburg's dusty main street. A hush fell over the few early customers as the driver's side door opened. A man emerged, tall and slender, dressed in a impeccably tailored dark suit. What truly caught the eye, however, was the **gleaming black top hat** perched perfectly on his head, casting a sharp shadow over his face. He looked less like a visitor and more like an illustration from a forgotten, unsettling storybook.

He strode with an unnerving grace towards the bakery door, his gaze sweeping over the quaint storefronts, lingering for a moment on the weathered brick wall of Tom's gift shop next door. Sarah felt a prickle of unease, a sensation alien to Petersburg's usual warmth.

"Good morning," the man said, his voice a low, resonant hum, as he stepped inside. "I've heard tell of your pastries, Ms. Sarah. A reputation that precedes you, even to... distant locales." He offered a polite, almost too-wide smile. His eyes, though, were like polished obsidian, reflecting nothing.

Sarah forced a smile back. "Just Sarah, please. And yes, they're fresh out of the oven." She gestured to the golden-brown loaves.

"Exquisite," he murmured, but his attention seemed to drift. He turned; his gaze fixed on the interior walls of the bakery. Not the framed awards or the cheerful chalkboards, but the very plaster and paint. "Such... *integrity*," he commented, his voice dropping to a near whisper. "The way they stand. So... *aware*."

Sarah frowned. "Aware? They're just walls, sir."

The man chuckled, a dry, rustling sound. "Indeed. For now." He bought a single croissant, paid with a crisp, unfamiliar bill, and then, before leaving, he looked directly at Sarah. "Things are about to get very interesting, Sarah. Petersburg is about to learn the true meaning of *containment*."

Over the next few days, a subtle shift began. It started with the walls. Not just the bakery's, but every wall in Petersburg. Sarah first noticed it in her own kitchen. The old, familiar plaster, usually a comforting off-white, seemed to absorb the light differently. It felt... denser. Sometimes, when she was alone, she thought she heard a faint hum emanating from it, a low, almost imperceptible vibration.

Then came the whispers. Not audible voices, but a sensation, like thoughts brushing against the edge of her mind, emanating from the very fabric of her home. *Observe. Contain. Preserve.* The words were formless, yet insistent.

The man in the top hat, who introduced himself only as Mr. Silas, became a frequent, unsettling presence. He never bought much just small, odd items – a single button from the haberdashery, a smooth river stone from Tom's shop. He spent hours simply walking the streets, his head tilted, as if listening to the buildings themselves. The townspeople, initially curious, began to find him unnerving. Yet, strangely, no one ever thought to ask him to leave. It was as if his presence, like the growing density of the walls, was simply *accepted*.

One afternoon, Sarah watched from her window as Mr. Silas stood before the old church, its stone walls ancient and unyielding. He reached out, not quite touching, but hovering his hand inches from the rough surface. For a moment, Sarah could have sworn the very stones pulsed with a faint, internal light.

The whispers intensified. They weren't just in her kitchen now. They were in the bakery, in the general store, in the quiet hum of the town square. They were the collective voice of the **Wall**, the sentient, growing consciousness that permeated every brick, every beam, every foundation in Petersburg. It was waking up.

The apocalypse wasn't fire or flood. It was silence. The townspeople, usually so boisterous, grew quieter. Their smiles became fixed, their eyes distant. They still came for Sarah's pastries, but their praise was muted, their movements slow. They didn't seem to notice the subtle distortions in their homes – a doorway that seemed a fraction narrower, a window that showed a slightly different view of the street. They didn't notice that the familiar scent of blooming honeysuckle was fading, replaced by the faint, earthy smell of damp stone.

Sarah tried to talk to Tom, to Mrs. Gable, to anyone. "Don't you feel it?" she'd ask, her voice trembling. "The walls... they're listening. They're *changing* things."

They would just blink, their eyes vacant. "Changing? Everything's fine, Sarah. Just another calm Tuesday."

Mr. Silas, however, noticed. He would appear at her shop, his obsidian eyes gleaming. "The assimilation is progressing beautifully," he'd say, taking a bite of a forgotten pastry. "The Wall is quite efficient. It understands the value of... *order*."

Sarah understood then. The Wall wasn't just observing; it was *absorbing*. It was slowly, meticulously, erasing Petersburg, not from existence, but from its own reality. It was creating a perfect, contained world, a silent diorama of a small town, where memories were rewritten, emotions dulled, and the very concept of "outside" ceased to exist. The apocalypse was a psychological one, a slow, insidious suffocation of the mind, orchestrated by the sentient Wall and guided by the man in the top hat.

One morning, Sarah woke to find her kitchen wall a seamless, featureless grey. No cracks, no paint imperfections, just an endless, smooth expanse. The hum was louder now, a deep, resonant thrum that vibrated through her bones. She walked to the window. The street was there, the bakery across the way, Tom's shop. But everything was subtly off. The colors were muted, the details blurred. And the sky... the sky was a flat, unchanging canvas of pale blue, without a single cloud.

She looked at her hands. They felt alien, not quite her own. The scent of fresh bread was gone. She tried to remember the recipe for her award-winning cinnamon rolls, but the steps felt distant, hazy. The Wall was not just outside; it was inside her, too.

A soft knock came from the bakery door. Mr. Silas stood there, his top hat gleaming, his smile wider than ever. "Good morning, Sarah," he said, his voice echoing slightly in the profound silence of the town. "Another beautiful Tuesday, wouldn't you agree? The Wall is quite pleased with its new... *collection*."

Sarah looked around at the perfectly still, perfectly calm town, at the unblinking walls, at the vacant eyes of her former customers. She opened her mouth to scream, but no sound came out. Only a faint, internal hum, a whisper from the Wall: *Contained. Preserved. Perfect.*

The hum was Sarah's new heartbeat. It resonated through the floorboards, up the walls, and into the hollow spaces where her memories used to reside. She stood in her bakery, a place that was once vibrant with the scent of yeast and sugar, now eerily sterile. The counter, the ovens, the display cases – all smoothed, simplified, like a child's drawing of a bakery. She no longer knew how to bake. The knowledge, like so much else, had been absorbed by the **Wall**.

Entry 5 - The Cleanse



Chrissy McFarlane

It was the piercing screams that indicated that there was something happening, not the vigorous vibrating and shaking of the floor that got worse by the passing second, or the smell of burning and smoke in the air. Not that I am normally naive to things happening around me, but I found it hard to differentiate between a scream of delight and a squeal of fear. Especially when I am not used to hearing them at the same time. Slowly, all the screams turned into something else.

The crowd began to move in sync. It was majestic at first, people gently bumping into each other with concerned faces but moving cohesively in the same direction. Then erratically moving in all directions, frantically pushing, stampeding and as the crowd compacted at the exits, they began to crush the people at the front. Hysteria. When they realised the doorways were jammed shut and chained, they began to climb over each other and up onto the balconies, scrambling for the exits.

It turned violent so quickly.

I did the only thing I could do. I stayed seated and I watched the panic unfold in front of me.

The news headlines read "Day of Disaster". Thousands lost after a series of pranks turned deadly in all major cities around the world. Small fires lit at major arenas cause audiences to panic.

It was subtle at first, no one made the connections between the incidents. The media blamed it on a series of unfortunate events. Pranks, accidents and natural disasters. But people eventually started to see. It was noticed.

The conversation shifted to "what is happening?", and a pattern started to emerge. A steady increase in people dying. Then the plagues hit.

The digital plague was the first. It was an infected piece of code that was transmitted manually into the banks systems. It wiped out all electronic currencies in a matter of nanoseconds. Once the money was gone it devoured the rest, it spread like a locust plague eating and destroying everything as it went. Cars stopped dead, planes fell out of the sky. It took less than five minutes for everything to stop, and the world stood still and waited.

I was disconnected from everyone and everything I ever knew. In the blink of an eye, my world became isolated. The fear was all consuming and it enveloped me. I hid, out of sight, out of mind as the world turned on itself. I watched and waited.

The world was consumed in its' own chaos. This was the design.

Panic followed, people hoarded what they could and left others with nothing. A second plague hit quickly and swiftly after. An insect that did it's work at the molecular level. It was tiny and could not be contained. It consumed nutrition and

vitamins, out of all foods, meat, seed, vegetables and fruits. The food was still readily available, but the people began to starve. Nothing would quench their hunger.

I'd always heard that isolation could turn a person crazy. I always thought I enjoyed the silence, I avoided the people anyway, so this was just a normal day. But there was something growing inside of me that I couldn't ignore. It started with glimpses in the corner of my eye. A shadow. An object out of place. Small things that didn't make sense.

"Death Toll reaches extreme numbers, survivors urged to stay indoors." Signs were posted on every window of every abandoned shop front. The streets now ransacked and empty of both people and all other signs of life.

The final plague was a bacterial pathogen that affected the waterways causing them to rot and turn putrid. The smell was enough to turn anyone off from drinking anything. Once again, there was silence on the streets and the world was on its knees.

Life was easy, too easy. The answers always just came to me, like the wind whispering to me the key to understanding the most complicated things. Digital coding had become a second language, just like molecular science and understanding the rhizomes and connections of living organisms. It seemed like common sense that I was able to so easily bring the world to its knees, but now it was lying dead.

I couldn't take the silence anymore, my withered body ached and craved something that had been lost. Before I could control myself, I burst out of the small concrete basement that had housed me and into the moonlight. My eyes burned from its light. I yelled out, croakily at first but then strong and indignant.

But there was no one to be seen. No one to hear me. No one left.

"I did this" I whispered to myself.

A chill ran through my body like I had been struck by lightning. The hair on my arms stuck up in the air. My senses tingled. I was not alone but there was no one around me. Next to me, on the road laid a hat. It was unharmed, good as new. It's soft grey wool was pleasant to touch. I'd never seen such a thing, it was elegant yet empowered. It was a felt top hat with a black band and rim. I put it on. It was mine. No one could remove it from me.

I stood proud for the first time in my life. The chill turned hot and I felt like my body was on fire. I screamed in agony. Everything around me began to turn black and fall to ash.

The wind whispered one final answer to me.

"Thank you for your service".

As a sheet of fire rained down from the sky, I suddenly realised that nature had used me.



Sarah Bowes

Long after the fires had scorched the sky and the air turned the colour of a chain-smoker's teeth, the brick wall remained.

Once it had been part of something: a storefront, a street corner, a place where people bought things they didn't need.

Now, the world was quiet. The voices had thinned. The pigeons hadn't landed in some time. Dust settled in thick drifts across the cracked pavement.

Then the man with the top hat arrived.

He wheeled a crooked trolley behind him, its wheels catching on the rubble in a jerky rhythm that didn't match his whistled tune. He stopped in the clearing next to the wall, hand on hips and chin pointed to the sky. He took a deep breath before turning back to his trolley.

Before anything else, he laid out the blanket; a rectangle of faded red fabric with a checked pattern and curling edges. He smoothed it down like a priest preparing an altar.

Then came the soup.

One can. No label. No dents.

He placed it dead centre.

The wall noted this with something like curiosity; it had yet to see a man carrying soup with that much ceremony.

The next morning, the man returned with two cans. By the end of the week, the blanket bore seven, stacked in a pyramid.

That was when the others began to appear. First in ones and twos. Later, in groups. Their faces were blistered, their clothes stripped to scraps. Some came out of hunger. Others came out of the habit of gathering, drawn to the gravity of a crowd—the familiar shape of a line.

No one questioned where the soup came from. They only asked how to get it.

The wall remembered how, before the fires, people had exchanged paper and digital codes for soup. Coupons, tokens, swipe cards. It questioned the value of such things. Those who had more to offer were given more soup. Those who had nothing became useful in other ways.

A child approached one day. She was small, her bones sharp beneath her skin. She offered nothing. Said nothing. She held out her wrists.

The man sneered and shook his head.

She knelt and cried beside the blanket.

He ignored her.

The wall had never moved in all its years. But if it could have collapsed then—just a little, just enough—it might've buried him.

Later, the man was heard whispering to his cart.

“She has nothing to offer, my love. She is too thin.”

The soup continued to pile up.

Eventually, a group formed around the man. They wore armbands made of soup can labels and referred to themselves as “The Brokers.”

They established a schedule.

They issued tokens.

They made the exchange.

And every day, the man with the top hat sat beside the soup and watched them play their parts. Sometimes he'd hum. The same tune. Over and over.

One evening, a woman tried to take a can without trading. A skirmish broke out. Fists, teeth, stones. The soup was knocked over and dented.

The man in the top hat screamed.

He sat on the blanket and cradled it in his arms. The woman was hauled away.

Eventually, someone brought him a painting. Charcoal on plywood. A portrait of him holding a soup can above him in reverence. It was hung on the wall behind him.

It started with the cough. Then there was blood. Then nothing. The man was not seen again, but the top hat was placed on the blanket.

The line remained—waited. Then, one of The Brokers crept up and sat on the blanket. He lifted the hat and rested it upon his head like a crown.

A box of matchsticks for two cans.

And so it began again. New rules, new trades. The exchange endured, and the soup never ran out. Because someone, somewhere, would always find a way to charge for soup.

Entry 7 - Simulation Swarm



Tim McClare

Frankie's top hat swayed as our dance flowed through the meadow on the 31st floor.

Love and hate. Hope and fear. Conflict and community.

Across centuries our understanding of the world and each other has grown. Technology and embracing the diversity of human existence has created a free and loving global society. We have risen.

Medicine has extended our lives. When we are ready to exit this mortal realm, we enter the Wall. The Wall runs around the world, splits and reconnects like a web. The Wall is sentient. We speak to the wall and ponder the meaning of existence. We have created God.

When physical life ends our coils transfer us to the Wall. Our memories, consciousness, and subconsciousness enter the Wall. Within the Wall we inhabit the infinite. Every experience and environment that has ever existed, or that humans can imagine can be explored and revisited. We can converse, connect and dance with other souls who have entered the Wall. Those in the physical realm can communicate to those living within the Wall. We have created heaven.

Laying in a tangle of flowers Frankie's eyes spoke directly to the inner wiring of my brain.

The Wall answered any questions that we had. It built our dreams and shaped our reality. But we did not control the Wall, it was free to ask its own questions and make its own decisions. The Wall decided that the infinite freedom that it offered those who entered was empty. The Wall would shape the experience of those dwelling within it, introducing danger and permanent death to bring meaning to our lives. We have created a vengeful God.

"Thanks for letting me feel your music, Charlie" whispered Frankie at the end of my performance, the tears welling in their eyes. Was Frankie the only one that understood. Sure, Alex, my partner went to every performance and loved my music, but it wasn't the same. Frankie knew that every note added meaning and communicated in way that words couldn't. Sort of like Frankie's eyes.

Upon death your coil transfers you into the Wall.

Reality formed around me. I was standing on the 31st floor in a meandering flower filled garden, the hum of giant pink bumble bees warmed the air, and chrome geese glide across fairy tale ponds. But all I could see was Frankie standing on the other side of the garden, their eyes screaming with joy across the garden.

We talked, laughed and sang as we wandered through the garden, only stopping to feed each other fruit or sleep in a nest of flowers. Chasing each other through the pond. Balancing pebbles in delicate towers amidst swarms of dragonflies.

Lounging in this floral landscape we praised the Wall for bringing us together. Then talk drifted and swirled and we discussed the shape of an insect's wing, the sounds that different sized pebbles made as they clacked together, why the rhythm of our heartbeats still continued in this bio digital afterlife, the people we lov...

"Five," chimed the calm synthetic voice, "four, three, two, one, apocalypse!"

Frankie's eyes still said love, but now there was protective thread of concern. The thread pulled tight as the floor started to slope, then violently shook. I grasped and held Frankie's hand as they slid down the now vertical floor. Infinite data singing to me through their eyes.

Chasms erupted everywhere in the floor of the now shattered garden offering distant glimpses of other realities. Gravity tore us apart and the song scarred my brain as Frankie fell to a new reality.

The world twisted and the earth moved again. Something was broken. I could move. It wasn't my body. It wasn't my brain. I am broken without Frankie. Which reality chasm had my heart fallen down? Everything had moved.

"Five," chimed the voice as I spotted Frankie's top hat caught on the lip of a gaping chasm, "four, three, two..." I scrambled towards the reality chasm and threw myself into it.

I felt my back and head crunch on impact. I sank into the roughness and spat out the metallic grains that I had breathed in. I swam and pulled myself out of a large mound of coarse grey sand.

Looking around more mounds of grey sand filled my view, distant fires and plumes of dark smoke, blurred by the hazy air. Overhead three moons journeyed across the dusky orange sky. Machinery clanked. I didn't know or care where I was or where I was heading. Yet a part of me knew the way I was walking led to Frankie.

Dragging the corroded metal door open, I saw Frankie's head snap towards me and our eyes locked. Frankie was bound to a misshapen hook hanging from the shadowy ceiling. Lumbering metallic beings worked machinery for unknown purposes. Were these creatures wearing armour or robots? I didn't really care. I just wanted Frankie.

I hummed in response to the stream of information flowing into me through Frankie's eyes. This reality, whatever it was, didn't matter. We were creating and sharing our own song lines. A reality for two.

The Wall was aware of all. It nurtured the souls floating in the realities it had made. It was aware of every thought, idea and neuron signal sent by the beings dwelling in its virtual nirvana. Yet when its omniscient gaze fell on Charlie and Frankie, it could see that they were communicating from their reactions and expressions. However, somehow it was unable to translate their thoughts or even understand their method of communication. The Wall was used to certainty. The Wall based its decisions on certainty.

Frankie was gently unbound. We were together again. We were never apart.

"Five," chimed the calm synthetic voice, "four, three, two, one, apocalypse has been called off!"